UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/49/572
25 October 1994

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-ninth session
Agenda item 88 (h)

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

International Year for the Eradication of Poverty

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 48/184 of 21 December 1993, entitled "International cooperation for the eradication of poverty in developing countries", the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly at its forty-ninth session, which would update his report submitted at the forty-eighth session (A/48/545). The focus of the updated report was to be, inter alia, on the development of appropriate inputs to country programmes by the United Nations system, based on exchange of information on and analysis of the operations of actual programmes and the identification of constraints and weaknesses of operational and coordinating capacities owing to lack of resources. Focus of the updated report was also to be on elements for the elaboration of multisectoral strategies.

2. The consultations carried out with the funds and programmes and organizations of the United Nations system have indicated that the kind of information required to prepare a report of such complex character and wide-ranging scope was not readily available, especially in view of the ongoing programme reviews that are being undertaken in many parts of the system in the light of the country-level poverty-related initiatives launched by many organizations. Moreover, considering that the subject of the report requested by the General Assembly is closely related to one of the main themes of the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development, to be held at Copenhagen in March 1995, namely the eradication of poverty, and the intensive system-wide preparations under way for the Summit, it appeared advisable to defer the submission of the report. This course of action was also necessitated to preserve the priority that needed to be given to the preparatory process for the Summit. This approach is further supported by the fact that the Commission for Sustainable Development, in its role of monitoring Agenda 21, will take up chapter 3 of that agenda which concerns combating poverty. In addition, the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 48/183, of 21 December 1993, in which the Assembly designated 1996 as the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, provides a suitable opportunity to submit to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session the report requested in resolution 48/184 in the context of any that may be required on the progress made in the Year.

3. In view of the above, it is suggested that, at its current session, the General Assembly, when taking up the item under consideration, may wish to focus its attention on the preparations for the Year and consider the broader system-wide programme issues at its fiftieth session.

4. In its resolution 48/183, the General Assembly further decided that major activities for the observance of the Year should be undertaken at local, national and international levels and that assistance should be provided by the United Nations system with a view to creating among States, policy makers and international public opinion a greater awareness that eradication of poverty is fundamental to reinforcing peace and achieving sustainable development. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a draft programme on the preparations for and observance of the Year in consultation with States, specialized agencies and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned, containing the objectives, principles and main recommendations for

the Year, and to submit a progress report to the Assembly at its forty-ninth session.

5. General Assembly resolution 48/183 allows two years for the preparations for the Year. This task needs to be considered in the light of the considerable work being done on the question of poverty, both conceptually and in terms of practical policy design and programme planning at local, national and international levels. Organizations of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations have, for instance, been requested to provide related material in connection with preparations for the World Summit for Social Development, which has the reduction and elimination of poverty as one of its three core issues. Governments have also been encouraged to set up coordinating mechanisms dealing, inter alia, with poverty.

6. The process of preparing the programme for the Year thus can draw upon a variety of activities of Governments, the non-governmental and private sectors and the United Nations system. This will proceed on the basis of maximum effective use of existing mechanisms for consultation and coordination among parties concerned to avoid requests for inputs that duplicate requests made in connection with related international events. The draft programme will focus on the role of the Year as a framework to publicize, promote and facilitate local and national action to eradicate poverty and to implement poverty-related objectives of international programmes adopted during the first-half of the 1990s.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

7. By building on the considerable national and international experience on the question of alleviation and eradication of poverty, it should be possible to complete the preparations for the Year without requesting Governments or concerned organizations of the United Nations system to provide additional input beyond that already submitted or planned for other purposes or outside the framework of regular scheduled meetings of the relevant intergovernmental organs. Preparations for the Year will concentrate on establishing effective links with efforts to implement poverty-related strategies contained in recent and anticipated international agreements and reports. These include: Agenda 21: programme of action for sustainable development; 1/ the report of the Secretary-General on an agenda for development (A/48/935); the programme of action of the United Nations Conference on Population and Development; 2/ the draft declaration and programme of action of the World Summit for Social Development; 3/ and the draft platform for action of the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace. 4/

8. Agenda 21 devotes a specific chapter to poverty eradication since this is central to efforts to achieve sustained and equitable development. Follow-up to poverty-related objectives of Agenda 21 were among the cross-sectoral issues considered by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its second session (16-27 May 1994). 5/

9. Poverty and its particular burden on women are among the major issues to be considered in the draft platform for action of the Fourth World Conference on

Women. The data available suggest little progress in reducing poverty among women; rather, the proportion of women among the poor is growing in many societies.

10. Reduction and elimination of poverty is one of the three core issues identified by the General Assembly for consideration by the World Summit for Social Development. To that end the United Nations organized with the World Bank an expert meeting on poverty at Lusaka from 27 to 29 June 1994, at the invitation of the Government of Zambia and with the financial assistance of Denmark and the Netherlands. 6/

11. The report of the Secretary-General on an agenda for development, prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/181, directs special attention to poverty alleviation as part of its discussion of "justice as a pillar of society". This was also reflected in the consideration of an agenda at the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council on 28 and 29 June 1994 and in its identification of priorities. 7/

12. At its second session, held at Geneva from 25 to 29 July 1994, the UNCTAD Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation considered poverty issues in relation to structural adjustment and to small-scale enterprises in international trade. The Committee also discussed possible recommendations to be considered by the World Summit for Social Development in the light of the role of UNCTAD as the focal point for trade and development questions. 8/

13. In its capacity as the preparatory body for the Year, the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the Secretariat established an ad hoc working group to prepare the draft programme for the observance of the Year.

14. As a first step, preparations for observance of the Year will involve establishment of appropriate mechanisms to promote greater awareness and understanding of various poverty-related strategies, programmes and objectives to promote practical action at local, national, and international levels. These mechanisms will give the Year a unique identity and ensure that it is more than just a follow-up to recent international events.

III. PROPOSED TIMETABLE FOR PREPARATION OF THE PROGRAMME FOR THE YEAR

15. Shown below is the proposed timetable for preparation of the programme for the observance of the Year and related consultations with Governments within the framework of regularly scheduled meetings of the General Assembly, and of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, with other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and within the United Nations system.

1994

November	General Assembly, Second Committee - consideration of the progress report regarding preparations for International Year for the Eradication of Poverty
December	In the light of consideration and action by the General Assembly, identification of possible themes for cooperation and common activities of the United Nations system regarding the Year

1995

January	Consultations on the Year with non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system in connection with the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development (New York, 16-27 January 1995)
March	Consideration of the topic in connection with the thirty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (New York, 15 March-4 April)
April	Consideration of the topic in connection with the third session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (New York, 17-28 April) and the thirty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development (New York, 10-20 April)
May to ...	Preparation of information material
June/July	Consideration by the Economic and Social Council (Geneva, 26 June-28 July) of the report of the Secretary-General containing the preliminary draft programme called for by the General Assembly in resolution 48/183
	Consultations with non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system in connection with the session of the Economic and Social Council
	Further consideration of the topic at the third session of the Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Geneva, 12-16 June)
August/ September	Finalization of the draft programme for the Year in the light of decisions taken at the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, consideration of the topic in the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies and consultations with non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system

October/ November — Consideration by the General Assembly of the report called for in its resolution 48/183 and adoption by the Assembly of programme for the observance of the Year. Consultations with non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system on the implementation of agreed activities

IV. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

16. Poverty takes many forms and manifests itself in different ways. It affects individuals as well as communities and nations. The causes are local and at the same time global. A great deal of experience has been accumulated over the years, including within the United Nations system, in diagnosing the causes of poverty and identifying the actions needed to deal with the root causes and alleviate its consequences on individuals and communities. Despite considerable achievement at the local and national levels in coming to grips with poverty it remains the major single social ill on the global scale.

17. The Year will build on the substantive experience already gained and on the policies and programmes that have proved successful. The preparations will be further assisted by decisions to be adopted by major international conferences being convened in 1994 and 1995, in particular the World Summit for Social Development, among whose three core issues singled out for special attention is the reduction and eradication of poverty. At the same time, to ensure that the Year makes a distinct and significant contribution to the effort to eradicate poverty, a number of particular themes might be highlighted. These could be chosen so as to reflect the multidimensional nature of the question and the multisectoral and multipronged and comprehensive approach required to meet the challenge of poverty.

18. In preparing for the Year, and during the Year itself, there will be various opportunities for the further coordination and harmonization of approaches, including the development of basic concepts, the standardization of terminology and definitions, improvement and achievement of greater comparability of statistics and a more effective evaluation of policies and programmes. However, the emphasis would need to be on concrete action, at all levels, and by the different social actors and, particularly, by the international community, including the United Nations system, in its supporting role. The Secretary-General welcomes observations and suggestions to assist him in identifying themes to be highlighted during the observance of the Year.

Notes

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992 (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Vol. I and Vol. I/Corr.1, Vol. II, Vol. III and Vol. III/Corr.1)) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. I: Resolutions adopted by the Conference, resolution 1, annex II.

2/ A/CONF.171/13, chap. I, resolution I, annex.

3/ A/CONF.166/PC/L.13; see also A/CONF.166/PC/L.18.

4/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1994, Supplement No. 7 (E/1994/27), chap. I.C, resolution 38/10, annex.

5/ E/1994/33.

6/ A/CONF.166/PC/17.

7/ E/1994/109.

8/ TD/B/CN.2/6.